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**ANALISIS OF INFLUENCE OF PRIOR
KNOWLEDGE ON THE SCORES OF THE
READING SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTING SYSTEM
(IELTS) B1 LEVEL**

**ANALISIS DE LA INFLUENCIA DE LOS CONOCIMIENTOS
PREVIOS EN LOS PUNTAJES DE LA SECCIÓN DE LECTURA
DEL INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTING
SYSTEM (IELTS) NIVEL B1**

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Analysis of Influence of prior Knowledge on the Scores of the Reading Section of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) B1 level

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ABSTRACT

The general objective of this article is to establish from a theoretical approach the level of influence of prior knowledge in the scores of the reading section of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), of B1 level students of a public university in Ecuador. The methodology used for this study was descriptive, since it was based on describing the most relevant aspects of the problem under study, it also had a documentary approach so that relevant information was extracted from scientific journals, articles and books related to similar topics within the context of reading comprehension and the international IELTS test. As a result, it was found that many authors claim that if the student has prior knowledge, his reading comprehension quality would improve; However, McNeil (2011) refers to the opposite by considering that such knowledge does not act effectively at the time of reading, arguing that this knowledge corresponds to an independent variable in reading, implying that there is a possibility that the perception of B1 level students about their prior knowledge of the topic of a reading does not align with their performance in a reading section of an IELTS test.

Keywords: prior knowledge, students, IELTS, reading

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Análisis de la Influencia de los Conocimientos Previos en los Puntajes de la Sección de Lectura del International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Nivel B1

RESUMEN

El objetivo general del presente artículo es establecer desde un enfoque teórico el nivel de influencia de los conocimientos previos en los puntajes de la sección de lectura del International English Language Testing System (IELTS), de estudiantes de nivel B1 de una universidad pública del Ecuador. La metodología utilizada para fue de tipo descriptiva, ya que se fundamentó en describir los aspectos más relevantes del problema en estudio, además tuvo un enfoque documental de forma que se extrajo información relevante de revistas científicas, artículos y libros relacionados a temas similares dentro del contexto de la comprensión lectora y la prueba internacional IELTS. Como resultado se obtuvo que son muchos los autores que afirman que si el estudiante cuenta con conocimientos previos mejoraría su calidad en comprensión lectora, sin embargo, McNeil (2011) refiere lo contrario al considerar que dichos conocimiento no actúan eficazmente al momento de leer, sosteniendo que este conocimiento corresponde a una variable independiente en la lectura, dando a entender que existe una posibilidad de que la percepción de los estudiantes de nivel B1 sobre sus conocimientos previos del tema de una lectura, no se alineen con su desempeño en una sección de lectura de un examen IELTS.

Palabras clave: conocimientos previos, estudiantes, IELTS, lectura

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the knowledge that students possess is acquired through the assimilation of a variety of information that they have obtained over time in their classrooms, that is, the absorption of prior knowledge or also known as the initial state. According to Méndez, (2007) in the student's initial state, certain capacities, strategies, instruments and general skills are taken into account to carry out learning. At this point, the cognitive abilities that the student possesses are incorporated, as well as their use of techniques, such as reading comprehension, language and writing.

In this way, prior knowledge is what the student has and is related to the content to be learned, which constitutes a series of past experiences that become the first reference when reading, which are focused to new knowledge. Authors such as Méndez (1993) affirm that prior knowledge corresponds to a fundamental aspect to be able to achieve meaningful learning, since it ensures that this learning is only achieved if there is a connection of the new knowledge with some already existing aspects in the student's cognitive structure.

Palincsar and Brown cited in (Lamazares, 2015) refer that one of the essential strategies in reading comprehension corresponds to the use of key prior knowledge according to the content, therefore, Solé (2006) also states that it is important to update students' prior knowledge when reading, Likewise, Sim-Sim and Viana (2007) consider that it is extremely relevant to relate information read with other knowledge external to the text, that is, it is necessary to relate new ideas to those already passed. Finally, Vidal, (2011) like previous authors, indicates that it is not about incorporating new knowledge, but rather activating that knowledge that was previously obtained by the reader.

However, authors such as McNeil (2011) have a different opinion, since they affirm that this prior knowledge does not act efficiently when carrying out reading comprehension, claiming that this knowledge corresponds to an independent variable in reading. Basically the problem is when that prior knowledge is not correct, this means, it is misleading.

According to the above, there is currently confusion among B1 level students at a public university in Ecuador regarding whether their prior knowledge of having read texts in English will help them understand a topic. Therefore, carrying out this study was important since it theoretically allowed us to



establish whether these students' perception of their prior knowledge can be aligned with their performance in the reading section of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

Theorization

What is reading?

Cáceres, et al. (2018) affirm that reading is defined as a very relevant and complex cognitive activity that is used to obtain knowledge. This activity becomes the primary learning instrument for students, since most academic tasks are based on reading. For their part, Felipe and Barrios (2017) refer that reading is a fundamental competence, whose relevance is found in the essential ability to access knowledge and develop capacities that are inherent to teaching in university institutions.

Likewise, reading consists of understanding what is being read, and this involves the practice of mental skills such as: analyzing, synthesizing, predicting, inferring, etc., this means that it allows inferences to be made to understand what is being read, to be able to construct diverse meanings. Therefore, reading not only depends on the deconstruction of the text, but also includes the reader, their knowledge, their point of view, adapting them to the context they are reading. (Herazo, 2015)

For this reason, Gaeta (2015) highlights the importance of the cognitive and motivational factors that encompass the understanding of academic texts, stating that students use strategies to self-regulate learning, that is, to achieve understanding, prior knowledge must be at hand, and adopt intrinsic goals that promote skill and learning. Therefore, it can be said that academic effectiveness from the basic levels and mainly in the area of higher education, depends on the strategies and resources that the individual has when reading.

On the other hand, according to Osorio et al. (2018) Reading is a way of accessing information and one of the important doors to support the generation of knowledge. Nowadays, it has been proven that if the student is trained and has reading skills, as a result he will have the best qualities to be able to function effectively in today's society, which is known as one that is based on information and knowledge. Knowledge, which is characterized by examining rapid transformations through the generation, use and dissemination of information, raw material and key to human knowledge.



And it is precisely in these environments that reading is established as that which opens the door to a society that knows, understands, consolidates, investigates, synthesizes, applies, constructs and reconstructs the knowledge of the world.

Reading at university

In this regard (Morales, 2020), Peña cited in , establishes that reading at the university functions as a mediator, so that it focuses on optimizing the thought processes and promoting the communicative skills of the students, conditioning them to participate effectively in their studies and the various understanding demands that are specific to the career they are studying.

The above means that the university student faces not only a new academic culture, but also new models of thinking that are made up of cognitive challenges on which their integration into the world of reading depends.

Therefore, Morales (2017), claims that this type of reading implies for the university student a way of verifying the authenticity of ideas through the encounter of theoretical and conceptual systems, from which relationships, notions about reality, connections, as well as the recognition of innovative constructions and argumentative plots, in which important scientific purposes and approaches are implicit , on which the real learning of any content depends, for this reason it is considered critical reading.

Critical reading at the university is then understood as an alternative to bring the student closer to constructing critical arguments, to establish relationships between reality and theoretical content as a requirement to understand the world and infer connections in which interdisciplinary training is associated to, and the integration of different learning, on which depends the student's intervention in the disciplinary field being trained.

Reading models

▪ Bottom-up model

Huarca (2022) states that this model is based on the text and it is identified that during reading we move from the simplest elements (letters) to more relevant and difficult ones such as words, phrases and, in conclusion, the text. Here, the reader tends to perceive the graphic symbols, then decodes them, that is, synthesizes them, understands them, memorizes them and finally, repeats them as a product of reading,



so it could be said that the comprehension process occurs sequentially and hierarchically. According to Colmenares (2020), this model guarantees that the student, when reading, is more perceptive to new information, which does not conform to his present hypothesis in relation to the content or structure of the text.

- **Top-down model**

This model is the opposite of the previous one, since during reading you first go from the most general units, that is, from the broadest to the easiest and you do so based on your previous knowledge and experiences. So, the student who reads takes the role of the fundamental axis instead of the text, because knowledge, experience, and what he has previously experienced have a notable impact on the comprehension of reading (Huarca, 2022).

Likewise, this model favors assimilation at the time of reading in a way that makes it easier to solve ambiguities and choose alternatives to possible interpretations of the current information. (Colmenares, 2020)

- **Interactive model**

In this case, during reading, in order to understand a text, the student makes use of the elements that they know in advance and in this way, they interact with the text actively, learning to process its different resources. Consequently, in this model the previous models (ascending and descending) coincide because textual understanding takes place from the exchange of what the reader reads and the knowledge they have about the topic (Herazo, 2015).

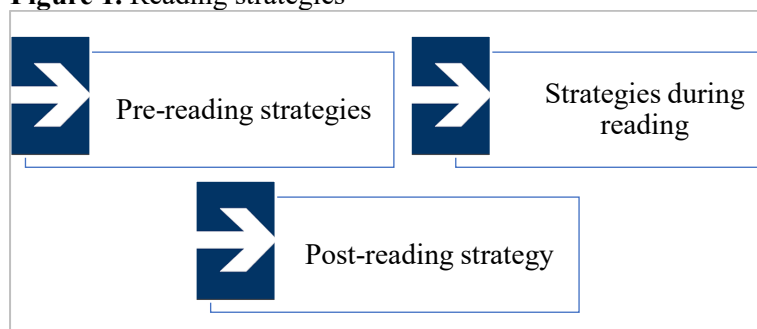
Due to the above, the comprehension of texts can be perceived as an interactive model between the reader's prior knowledge about the content and structure, and the text itself, since it must be noted that only the text has no meaning, since that the idea that university students discover the way in which they should construct the meaning is required based on their own prior knowledge (Morales, 2020).

Reading strategies

According to Montaña (2006), there are 3 types of strategies:



Figure 1. Reading strategies



Source: self made

The strategies prior to reading cover why and what for the student is going to read, that is, the disposition of an objective, a reading purpose. In this strategy it is possible to establish what are the objectives proposed by the readers, in addition to this, strategies that activate prior knowledge of the content of the text or the typology to which the text belongs are included and, it is usually done in the following ways : questions: What can you know from this text? What is the knowledge regarding this specific topic? (Montaño, 2006).

For its part, the strategy during reading seeks to reach a conclusion and formulate hypotheses that are examined or canceled during the reading process, therefore, at this stage questions can be asked such as: what is this text about? What does its structure mean to me? Finally, the post-reading strategy tends to evaluate the understanding obtained from the text; summaries are normally prepared, new questions are asked and answered, important passages are remembered and recorded in memory (Montaño, 2006). According to the aforementioned author, by taking these types of strategies into account, the university student can understand the teaching of reading comprehension as steps that lead to new knowledge, facilitating the teaching and learning of reading.

English proficiency exams

Bachman cited in (Araya, 2021), states that the design, development and use of English exams are difficult and technical processes, especially when decisions are made based on the results that affect the institutions and people involved. The tests require the intervention of professionals not only in language but also in measurement.

Likewise, Mcnamara cited in (Araya, 2021), considers that the people in charge of developing the exams must take into account the people who are going to be "affected" by these tests, the teachers, who are

indirectly evaluated in these exams, and the result of the test at an external level. Which means that the possible effects must be anticipated during the formulation and implementation of the exam.

Brown (2019) says that the standardized test of knowledge of a language like English does not tend to be complete and this is manifested both in theory and in practice. For this reason, those who do this type of testing must consider to incorporate various basic principles in the design this is a must, so standardized tests must be reliable, they must be validated and they must be genuine. At this point the author reiterates that there must also be learning not only on the part of the people who receive the tests but also for those who prepare them.

Hughes cited in (Viñas & Nigro, 2018) states that a test is considered complete when its design in the structure guarantees that the results obtained at a given time will be as similar as possible to those obtained if the same test were administered to the same students, under the same conditions but at different times. In this context, two elements must be taken into account: the length of the test and clarity. The first of them is due to the greater the exchange time with the candidate, the greater reliability will be achieved in the assignment of their level, however, the author considers that the test should not exceed fifteen or twenty minutes, since the student can get tired or bored affecting the sample.

In relation to clarity, Hughes cited in (Viñas & Nigro, 2018) indicates that it is important that the questions are unambiguous, that is, they must be safe and give the student a clear scenario of what they are expected to answer. If this is the case of an oral test, it is necessary that the person examining the test read directly from the script and not paraphrase or explain to add any aspect. This must be done in order to avoid saying or substituting words that could be misinterpreted. that is to be expressed in the test, thus ensuring equal opportunities for all students.

IELTS

It is that test used to evaluate the linguistic skills of individuals who have a goal abroad, such as working or studying outside their country of origin, because a large number of students carry out this test with the aim of purpose of guaranteeing their admission to colleges and universities in countries such as Canada, England and the USA. (IELTS, 2015)

Furthermore, the IELTS is also known as the international test due to how it is constituted, since the tasks and texts it uses are from various English linguistic forms. A characteristic example can be seen



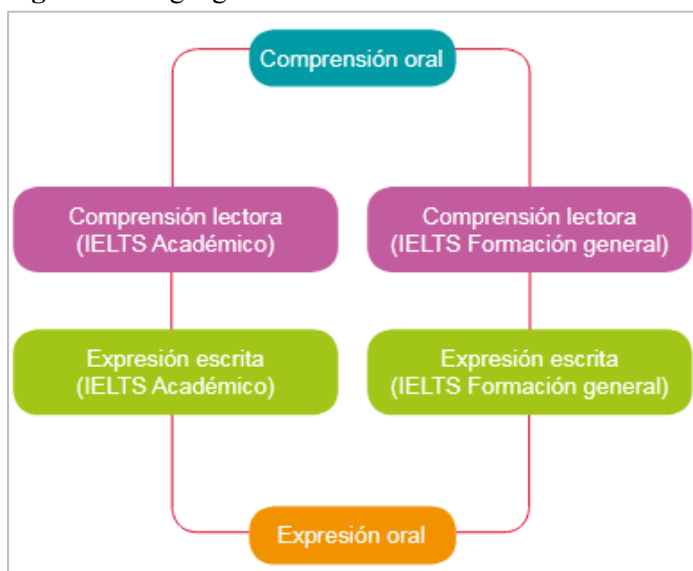
in the oral comprehension test, in which the use of documents with different accents of native speakers and in oral and written production any of the forms that already exist are accepted, in this way it can be seen that this test tries to integrate, from this point of view, the world reality and linguistic variety. (IELTS, 2015)

Likewise, this test is designed by specialists in linguistic evaluation, supported at all times by a research and validation program, which is responsible for generating confidence in those evaluated and all those people who accept and approve the application of the test.

▪ **Language skills that are evaluated**

The linguistic skills that are evaluated in the IELTS test are the following: oral comprehension, reading comprehension, written expression and oral expression (see figure 2). It should be noted that the oral comprehension, reading comprehension and written expression tests must be carried out on the same day, taking into account that the order they will be carried out may vary, so there are no breaks between these three tests. For its part, the oral expression test is normally carried out up to 7 days before or after the other 3 tests. (IELTS, 2015)

Figure 2. Language skills assessed in IELTS



Source: Adapted from IELTS (2015).

It is important to note that all people take the same oral comprehension and oral expression tests, however, the reading comprehension and written expression tests are different for IELTS Academic and for IELTS General Training. The following table specifies the characteristics of each skill to be evaluated:

Table 1. Characteristic of language skills

Ability	Duration	Number of questions	Parts of the test	Considerations that are evaluated	Qualification
Oral comprehension	30 minutes	It is made up of 40 questions	It is made up of 4 parts: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conversation between 2 people within a social setting. 2. Monologue within an everyday social environment. 3. Conversation between 4 people within an educational context. 4. Monologue on a topic of academic interest. 	Understanding of: Main ideas, specific factual data. Recognition of: Opinions, attitudes, etc. Monitoring the development of an argument.	1 point is awarded for each correct answer. Scores from a total of 40 points are transformed to the IELTS 9-band scale.
Reading comprehension	60 minutes	It is made up of 40 questions	It is made up of 3 parts: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It has 2 or 3 short factual texts, where one of them can be mixed. 2. It has two short factual texts based on topics related to employment. 3. It has a longer and more difficult text on a topic of general interest. 	Reading to understand the essentials. Reading to understand the main ideas. Reading to understand the details. Level of understanding of the conclusions and the meaning within them. Identification of the opinions, attitudes and objective of the author Monitoring the development of an argument.	It is valued the same as the previous skill and in addition, the scores are denoted in full bands and half bands.
Written expression	60 minutes	It is made up of 2 tasks. Task 1 must contain at least 150 words and task 2 a minimum of 250 words.	It is divided into three elements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Content. 2. Organization of ideas. 3. Accuracy and diversity of vocabulary and grammar. 	Written expression (IELTS Academic): Task 1: the ability to organize, present and possibly compare information, describe the stages of a process, object or explain how something works will be evaluated. Task 2: a solution to a specific problem must be made, an opinion presented and justified, etc. Written expression (IELTS General training):	Ratings are set in full bands and half bands.



				Task 1: the ability to maintain personal involvement will be appreciated in order to obtain general factual information, externalize needs, tastes, desires, etc. Task 2: the ability to summarize a problem, provide a solution, justify an opinion, etc. will be estimated.	
Oral expression	14 minutes	40 questions	It is made up of 3 parts: 1. The examiner complies with the presentation and conducting an interview. 2. The student must talk about a topic, then the examiner will ask questions related to that topic. 3. Dialogue between the examiner and the student, allowing more abstract topics to be touched on.	Ability to express opinions and information on day-to-day topics. Ability to maintain extensive conversations. Ability to express and justify opinions.	The evaluation criteria of the IELTS speaking exam (confidence in expressing oneself and coherence, lexical resources, grammatical diversity and pronunciation) will be taken into account.

Source: Adapted from IELTS (2015).

▪ IELTS scoring system

The IELTS was developed to evaluate the student's skills in the English language at a wide variety of levels, so there is no failure or passing. Consequently, the test uses a band scoring system to evaluate the results, so that 1 corresponds to the lowest band and 9 to the highest (see figure 3):

Figure 3. IELTS banded scoring scale

Escala de la puntuación por bandas del IELTS	
9	Usuario experto
8	Muy buen usuario
7	Buen usuario
6	Usuario competente
5	Usuario modesto
4	Usuario limitado
3	Usuario muy limitado
2	Usuario intermitente
1	No usuario
0	No intentó realizar la prueba

Source: Adapted from IELTS (2015)



Given the theoretical review, the general objective of this article was to establish, from a theoretical approach, the level of influence of prior knowledge on the scores of the reading section of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), of students of B1 level from a public university in Ecuador; Therefore, it was analyzed whether students' perception of their prior knowledge of the topic of a reading aligns with their performance in a reading section of an IELTS exam.

METHODOLOGY

Type of study

The type of research was descriptive, since it was based on describing the most relevant aspects of a problem, phenomenon, situation or behavior of a population, therefore, it had a documentary approach so that information was extracted from scientific journals, articles and books related to similar topics within the context of reading comprehension and the international IELTS test.

Analysis Technique

Cartography was carried out as an analysis technique, which according to Tobón (2017) has multiple uses for analysis, in this case study, it sought to provide a solution to the problem raised, so it followed the procedure based on: investigating, organizing, analyzing, constructing and implementing scientific knowledge.

Study Guidelines

The guidelines implemented for the construction of this research took into account studies carried out in Ecuador and other countries in magazines, most of them towards the higher education part, and explanatory documents were also investigated regarding reading comprehension, prior knowledge and how the latter influence the international IELTS test.

CONCLUSIONS

Most of the authors cited in this article agree that the student's prior knowledge about reading is a crucial element to achieve meaningful learning, because they assure that meaningful learning can only be achieved if a connection of new knowledge with some element already existing in the reader's cognitive structure is generated. And in this way it will make way for your reading comprehension to be effective. However, other authors affirm that this is not definitive, that is, that prior knowledge does not act efficiently when carrying out reading comprehension, implying that there is a possibility that students'



perception of level B1 from a public university in Ecuador on your prior knowledge of the topic of a reading, do not align with your performance on a reading section of an IELTS exam.

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